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Message Text

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NEA-10 TRSE-00 MBFR-03 SAJ-01 IO-13 OMB-01 RSR-01

ACDA-19 /138 W
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R 261748 Z JUN 73
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2184
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
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USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 07401

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UK, EI
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OUTLOOK
AND POLITICAL SCENARIO

SUMMARY: A SENIOR NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE OFFICIAL HAS PROVIDED US SOME INSIGHT INTO HMG THINKING ABOUT THE OUTLOOK FOR THE JUNE 28 NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS THAT WILL FOLLOW. CONFIDENT THAT THE ELECTION CAN TAKE PLACE WITHOUT EXCESSIVE DISRUPTION AND WITH GOOD VOTER PARTICIPATION, HMG HOPES THAT OFFICIAL UNIONISTS WILL SHOW MORE ATTRACTION TO PROTESTANT VOTERS THAN EXTREME LOYALISTS. THEY CONSIDER IT NECESSARY THAT FAULKNER EMERGES IN A STRONG ENOUGH POSITION TO MAKE COMPROMISES NEEDED TO GET A POWER- SHARING OPERATION IN THE ASSEMBLY GOING. BRITISH OFFICIALS RECOGNIZE THAT THE POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS TO ACHIEVE THIS WILL TAKE TIME - AND COULD EVEN FAIL - BUT HOPE THAT ENOUGH PROGRESS WILL BE MADE BY SEPTEMBER- OCTOBER THAT THE ASSEMBLY COULD BEGIN
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OPERATING WELL BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. IF NO POLITICAL POWER- SHARING BETWEEN THE PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC PARTIES CAN BE WORKED OUT, BRITISH OFFICIALS SEE NO ALTERNATIVE TO CONTINUED DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER. FOR THEIR PART, LABOR PARTY CONTINUES STRONGLY TO SUPPORT THE GOVERMENT' S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS AND POWER- SHARING PLAN. BUT LABOR IS WARNING NORTHERN IRELAND VOTERS THAT THIS MAY BE THEIR LAST CHANCE. END SUMMARY

1. ELECTION CAMPAIGN. OUR SOURCE NOTED THAT NOT MUCH EXCITEMENT HAD YET BUILT UP BEHIND CAMPAIGNING FOR WHAT MUST BE REGARDED AS AN ELECTION OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO NORTHERN IRELAND, UK AND REPUBLIC. ALTHOUGH HMG HAS BEEN CONCERNED BY INFLAMATORY AND UNTRUTHFUL STATEMENTS MADE BY CRAIG AND PAISLEY SO FAR, IT IS HOPING THAT LOYALIST RHETORIC WILL NOT UPSET THINGS TOO MUCH AND THAT THERE WILL BE A VOTER TURNOUT SIMILAR TO LAST MONTH' S LOCAL ELECTIONS. OUR SOURCE SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE EITHER IRA OR PROTESTANT EXTREMISTS WERE IN A POSITION SERIOUSLY TO DISRUPT ELECTIONS.

2. ELECTION RESULTS. MAKING THE OBVIOUS POINT THAT ELECTION RESULTS COULD NOT BE PRECISELY PIN- POINTED, BRITISH OFFICIALS ESTIMATE FOLLOWING BREAKDOWN FOR 78 SEAT ASSEMBLY;

OFFICIAL UNIONIST (FAULKNER SUPPORTERS), 25-35
LOYALISTS (CRAIG, PAISLEY, ETC.), 15-25
ALLIANCE, 10-15
SDLP, 10-15
OTHER, 5

MOST DESIRABLE OUTCOME, FROM HMG' S POINT OF VIEW, WOULD BE TO SEE A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF OFFICIAL UNIONIST AND A MINIMUM NUMBER OF LOYALISTS ELECTED. AS BRITISH SEE SITUATION, THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO A DOMINANT ROLE FOR FAULKNER. TERMS OF THE CONSTITUTION BILL AND POLITICAL ARITHMETIC WILL REQUIRE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS TO COOPERATE WITH THE SDLP AND PROBABLY ALLIANCE. THE STRONGER FAULKNER' S POSITION IS AND THE WEAKER THE LOYALIST POSITION IS, THE MORE LIKELY IS POSSIBILITY THAT FAULKNER WILL BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE COMPROMISES

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NEEDED TO GET A SHA- ED- POWER OPERATION GOING. IF, HOWEVER, LOYALISTS DO WELL AND OFFICIAL UNIONISTS POORLY IT WILL BE A DOUBLY SERIOUS SITUATION BECAUSE FAULKNER' S AUTHORITY OVER WAIVERERS IN HIS OWN RANKS WILL BE WEAKENED.

3. POST- ELECTIONS SCENARIO. IN GENERAL TERMS FOLLOWING

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DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD TAKE PLACE AFTER ELECTION:
A. ELECTED PARTIES WILL HAVE TO NEGOTIATE AN AGREED BASIS FOR SHARING POWER IN NEW ASSEMBLY.
B. ASSEMBLY WILL HAVE TO CHOOSE A PRESIDING OFFICER AND FORMULATE ITS OWN PROCEDURAL RULES. (BRITISH HOPE THAT " NEUTRAL" COULD BE CHOSEN TO PRESIDE.)
C. BRITISH MUST COMPLETE THEIR OWN LEGISLATIVE
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RSR-01 EB-11 /149 W
---------- 055457
R 261748 Z JUN 73
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2185
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REQUIREMENTS, (1) PASSAGE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL BILL (NOW EXPECTED BY THE END OF JULY), (2) PASSAGE OF A MODIFICATION ORDER APPROPRIATELY AMMENDING ALL EXISTING NORTHERN IRELAND LEGISLATION (A MOUNTAINOUS BUT POLITICALLY INSIGNIFICANT TASK), AND (3) PASSAGE OF AN IMPLEMENTING ORDER WHICH, IN EFFECT, WILL GIVE THE ASSEMBLY GO- AHEAD TO BEGIN OPERATING.

4. THE MOST IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT, OF COURSE, IS THE POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO SOME ACCEPTABLE;

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AGREED POWER- SHARING. OUR SOURCE COMMENTED THAT THERE ARE THREE WAYS THIS COULD DEVELOP:

(A) QUICKLY, I. E. FAULKNER IN A POSITION OF STRENGTH MIGHT BE ABLE TO AGREE FAIRLY READILY ON A BASIS OF POWER- SHARING WITH THE SDLP. IF THIS APPEARED WORKABLE, WHITELAW WOULD GIVE HIS BLESSING, AS REQUIRED IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL BILL. THIS IS CONSIDERED THE MOST DESIRABLE, BUT NOT THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME. IF IT DOES HAPPEN, IT WILL IMPOSE A MAJOR SPEED- UP OF PARLIAMENTARY IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION IN ORDER TO

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BEAT THE AUGUST SUMMER RECESS.

(B) MORE LIKELY IS THE SITUATION WHERE FAULKNER WILL BE EITHER UNABLE (FOR LACK OF SUPPORT) OR UNWILLING TO MAKE SUCH CONCESSIONS TO THE SDLP AS WILL IN THE END BE NECESSARY TO SECURE THEIR COOPERATION IN THE ASSEMBLY. WHITELAW IS PREPARED TO INTERVENE IN SUCH A CASE. ASSUMING SUCH INTERVENTION COULD BRING ABOUT A REASONABLY SATISFACTORY OUTCOME, AN AGREEMENT MIGHT BE REACHED IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER.

(C) NO POWER- SHARING AGREEMENT CAN BE NEGOTIATED. IF A DEADLOCK OR PROLONGED STALEMATE RESULTS IN NO AGREEMENT, HMG RECOGNIZES IT WILL HAVE TO CONTINUE WITH DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER, ROUGHLY AS IT IS AT PRESENT. THE CONSTITUTIONAL BILL PROVIDES THAT IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES ANOTHER ELECTION COULD BE CALLED (AFTER MARCH 74) WITH A VIEW TO CONSULTING AGAIN THE WISHES OF THE NI ELECTORATE BEFORE, IN EFFECT, GIVING UP THE CURRENT EFFORT TO PRODUCE A POLITICAL SOLUTION. (BRITISH OFFICIALS UNDERSTANDABLY HOPE THIS ESCAPE- HATCH DEVICE WILL NOT PROVE NECESSARY.)

5. WHAT IF ALL FAILS? THERE CAN BE NO DENYING THE BRITISH CONCERN - SHARED ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM - THAT THE WHOLE COMPLEX POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY EFFORT TO BRING SOME STABILITY TO NI THROUGH DIRECT RULE AND THE RESORT TO POLITICAL PROCESSES MIGHT COME TO NOTHING. THE BRITISH PRESS REGULARLY AND INSISTENTLY CALLS ON THE NI PARTIES NOT TO LET THE OPPORTUNITY NOW PRESENTED SLIP AWAY. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN MAKING THIS POINT FORCEFULLY TO ALL CONCERNED IN NI, IT HAS BELIEVED IT UNWISE TO USE AN " ALL OR NOTHING" ARGUMENT, SINCE THIS COULD GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE MOST EXTREME ELEMENTS IN NI WHO WANT A BREAKDOWN AND/ OR WITHDRAWAL OF THE BRITISH COMMITMENT. THE LABOR PARTY OPPOSITION IN WESTMINSTER HAS FIRMLY SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT' S NI POLICIES. HOWEVER, IT HAS NOT CONSIDERED ITSELF UNDER THE SAME CONSTRAINTS AS THE GOVT. ON JUNE 14, LABOR' S JIM CALLAGHAN SAID BLUNTLY IN PARLIAMENT THAT IF THE PARTIES IN NI ATTEMPTED TO

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SABOTAGE THE NI ASSEMBLY, THE LP POSITION WOULD HAVE
TO BE RECONSIDERED. " BRITAIN CANNOT BLEED FOREVER."
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IN AN IMPORTANT JUNE 22 SPEECH, HAROLD WILSON DEFINED
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RSR-01 EB-11 /149 W
---------- 055496
R 261748 Z JUN 73
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2186
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
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THE LABOR PARTY POSITION MORE CLEARLY. EXHORTING NI
CITIZENS TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY REPRESENTED BY NEW
CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS, WILSON SAID " WE ASK THEM TO
RECOGNIZE THAT NOT ONLY IS THIS FOR THEM THEIR GREAT
OPPORTUNITY, IT MAY BE MORE THAN THAT. IT MAY BE THEIR
LAST... (THEY) MUST RECOGNIZE... WHEN THEY MAKE THEIR
CHOICE NEXT WEEK THAT THERE IS A GROWING FEELING IN
THIS COUNTRY, A FEELING WHICH COULD RAPIDLY BECOME
IRREVERSIBLE, THAT WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO ASK THE FORCES
TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE A TEMPORARY MILITARY HOLDING

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OPERATION IF THE POLITICAL SOLUTION WHICH PROVIDES THE ONLY PERMANENT ANSWER IS WITHHELD BY THE FREE VOTE OF THE NI PEOPLE IN THE BALLOT BOX." WILSON WENT ON, REFERRING TO A " TIMES" LEADER, TO WARN THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE " SOFT OPTION" TO THE NI ASSEMBLY PLAN FOR POLITICAL POWER- SHARING.

6. COMMENT: THE ABOVE REFLECTION OF OFFICIAL BRITISH VIEWS WAS PROVIDED BEFORE THE IMPLICATION OF COSGRAVE' S IMPORTANT SPEECH AT BLACKBROOK ON JUNE 21 COULD BE
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FULLY ASSESSED. THE INITIAL REACTION HERE WAS VERY FAVORABLE AND THE BRITISH HOPE THAT COSGRAVE' S FORTH-COMING AND MODERATE STANCE WILL FAVORABLY INFLUENCE THE ELECTION OUTCOME. AT THE SAME TIME, THOSE FAMILIAR WITH NI PROTESTANT VIEWS ARE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE LONG AND DIFFICULT DISTANCE TO BE COVERED BEFORE ULSTER PROTESTANTS CAN BE BROUGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN A MEANINGFUL COUNCIL OF IRELAND.

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts:
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 JUN 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: willialc
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973LONDON07401
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: XGDS-1
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730630/aaaajqho.tel
Line Count: 307
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: willialc
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 AUG 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10-Aug-2001 by elyme>; APPROVED <29-Aug-2001 by willialc>
Review Markings:

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Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> jms 980227
Subject: NORTHERN IRELAND: ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OUTLOOK AND POLITICAL SCENARIO
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, EI, UK
To: BELFAST
DUBLIN
EC BRUSSELS
EUR
NATO BRUSSELS
SECSTATE WASHDC
Type: TE

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